



FACT SHEET ON VOTER ID LAWS

(May 2017)

BACKGROUND

Voter identification laws are a part of an ongoing strategy to roll back decades of progress on voting rights. Thirty-four states have identification requirements at the polls. Seven states have **strict photo ID laws**, under which voters must present one of a limited set of forms of government-issued photo ID in order to cast a regular ballot – no exceptions.

Voter ID laws deprive many voters of their right to vote, reduce participation, and stand in direct opposition to our country's trend of including more Americans in the democratic process. Many Americans do not have one of the forms of identification states acceptable for voting. These voters are disproportionately low-income, racial and ethnic minorities, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Such voters more frequently have difficulty obtaining ID, because they cannot afford or cannot obtain the underlying documents that are a prerequisite to obtaining government-issued photo ID card.

VOTER ID LAWS DEPRIVE MANY AMERICANS OF THE RIGHT TO VOTE

- **Millions of Americans Lack ID.** 11% of U.S. citizens – or more than 21 million Americans – do not have government-issued photo identification.¹
- **Obtaining ID Costs Money.** Even if ID is offered for free, voters must incur numerous costs (such as paying for birth certificates) to apply for a government-issued ID.
 - **Underlying documents required to obtain ID cost money,** a significant expense for lower-income Americans. The combined cost of document fees, travel expenses and waiting time are estimated to range from \$75 to \$175.²
 - **The travel required is often a major burden** on people with disabilities, the elderly, or those in rural areas without access to a car or public transportation. In Texas, some people in rural areas must travel approximately 170 miles to reach the nearest ID office.³
- **Voter ID Laws Reduce Voter Turnout.** A 2014 GAO study found that strict photo ID laws reduce turnout by 2-3 percentage points,⁴ which can translate into tens of thousands of votes lost in a single state.⁵

¹ Brennan Center for Justice, *Citizens without Proof: A Survey of Americans' Possession of Documentary Proof of Citizenship and Photo Identification* (New York: Brennan Center for Justice, 2006), http://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/d/download_file_39242.pdf, 1.

² Richard Sobel, *The High Cost of 'Free' Photo Voter Identification Cards* (Cambridge: Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School, 2014), <https://today.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/FullReportVoterIDJune20141.pdf>, 2.

³ *Ibid* 21.

⁴ Government Accountability Office, *Issues Related to State Voter Identification Laws*, report to Congressional requesters, September 2014, <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/665966.pdf>, 48.

⁵ Philip Bump, "Voter ID laws in Kansas and Tennessee dropped 2012 turnout by over 100,000 votes," Washington Post (Oct. 9, 2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/10/09/gao-voter-id-laws-in-kansas-and-tennessee-dropped-2012-turnout-by-over-100000-votes/?utm_term=.98af0620fca6.

VOTER ID LAWS ARE DISCRIMINATORY

- Minority voters disproportionately lack ID. Nationally, up to 25% of African-American citizens of voting age lack government-issued photo ID, compared to only 8% of whites.⁶
- States exclude forms of ID in a discriminatory manner. Texas allows concealed weapons permits for voting, but does not accept student ID cards. Until its voter ID law was struck down, North Carolina prohibited public assistance IDs and state employee ID cards, which are disproportionately held by Black voters. And until recently, Wisconsin permitted active duty military ID cards, but prohibited Veterans Affairs ID cards for voting.
- Voter ID laws are enforced in a discriminatory manner. A Caltech/MIT study found that minority voters are more frequently questioned about ID than are white voters.⁷
- Voter ID laws reduce turnout among minority voters. Several studies, including a 2014 GAO study, have found that photo ID laws have a particularly depressive effect on turnout among racial minorities and other vulnerable groups, worsening the participation gap between voters of color and whites.⁸

VOTER ID REQUIREMENTS ARE A SOLUTION IN SEARCH OF A PROBLEM

- In-person fraud is vanishingly rare. A recent study found that, since 2000, there were **only 31 credible allegations** of voter impersonation – the only type of fraud that photo IDs could prevent – during a period of time in which over 1 billion ballots were cast.⁹
- Identified instances of “fraud” are honest mistakes. So-called cases of in-person impersonation voter “fraud” are almost always the product of an elections worker or a voter making an honest mistake, and that even these mistakes are extremely infrequent.¹⁰
- Voter ID laws are a waste of taxpayer dollars. States incur sizeable costs when implementing voter ID laws, including the cost of educating the public, training poll workers, and providing IDs to voters.
 - Texas spent nearly **\$2 million** on voter education and outreach efforts following passage of its Voter ID law.¹¹
 - Indiana spent over **\$10 million** to produce free ID cards between 2007 and 2010.¹²

The ACLU has led the charge against Voter ID in several states, challenging voter ID laws in in states such as Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Wisconsin, and North Carolina. For more information, please contact Robert Hoffman at rhoffman@aclu.org or visit <https://www.aclu.org/issues/voting-rights/fighting-voter-suppression/fighting-voter-id-requirements> to learn more.

⁶ Brennan Center for Justice, *Citizens without Proof: A Survey of Americans' Possession of Documentary Proof of Citizenship and Photo Identification*, 3.

⁷ Lonna Rae Atkeson et al., “New Barriers to Participation: Application of New Mexico’s Voter Identification Law” (working paper, Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project, 2007), http://vote.caltech.edu/documents/84/vtp_wp59.pdf, 23.

⁸ See also Zoltan Hajnal, Nazita Lajevardi, and Lindsay Nielson, “Voter Identification Laws and the Suppression of Minority Votes” (University of California San Diego, 2016), <http://pages.ucsd.edu/~zhajnal/page5/documents/voterIDhajnaletal.pdf>, 16.

⁹ Justin Levitt, “A Comprehensive Investigation of Voter Impersonation Finds 31 Credible Incidents Out of One Billion Ballots Cast,” Washington Post, August 6, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/08/06/a-comprehensive-investigation-of-voter-impersonation-finds-31-credible-incidents-out-of-one-billion-ballots-cast/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jim Malewitz, “Study: Law Discouraged More Than Those Without Voter ID,” The Texas Tribune, August 6, 2015, <https://www.texastribune.org/2015/08/06/study-law-discouraged-more-those-without-voter-id/>.

¹² Iowa State Association of County Auditors, “A Report on Photo ID for Voting Purposes (Iowa: ISACA Photo ID Exploratory Committee, 2011), <http://www.lwwi.org/Portals/0/IssuesAdvocacy/PDF/ISACA%20Voter%20ID%20Report%20020211%20final2%5B1%5D.pdf>, 7.